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NFIB Meeting
3 December 1987SUGGESTED DCI OPENING REMARKS

The Estimate that we are considering today is the first product of the Intelligence Community to deal specifically with the issue of Islamic Fundamentalism and the political implications of the Islamic revival. This estimate was intended to examine some of the broader and subtler impacts of the Islamic resurgence which can--and will--affect US interests in the Arab world, rather than concentrating on the more spectacular revolutionary and terrorist manifestations, which have been treated in a number of Community products.

To a far larger extent than is usual, material for this estimate was gathered from open source material and academic research. The Islamic resurgence--as this Estimate hopefully makes clear--is a diffuse social, economic, religious, and political phenomenon, with no epicenter and with little structure or organization. As such, the Islamic resurgence has been an extremely difficult subject [REDACTED]

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Coordination of the draft was a long process, taking four sessions over a period of two weeks. The time devoted to the coordination meetings was well spent, however, with intense discussion and debate among the analysts and Community representatives. The "optimistic" and "pessimistic" views expressed in the Estimate are indicative of the range of analysts' basic assumptions in dealing with this complex problem.

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I invite the Chairman of the National Intelligence Council to open the discussion.

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TAB A -- NIE 36-87: Islamic Fundamentalism: Implications for the Arab World and the United States, NIO/NESA, Dan Webster

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NIE 36-87: Islamic Fundamentalism: Implications for
the Arab World and the United States

Issues Which May Arise at the Meeting

- We are not aware of an intention by any Agency to offer proposed modifications, new text, and/or footnotes to this Estimate at the NFIB meeting. Several general issues could come up for discussion at NFIB, however, reflecting some unease expressed at the coordination sessions.
- Some analysts, particularly from State/INR, were very concerned that the Estimate not be written in such a way as to reinforce perceived anti-Arab or anti-Muslim views of some policymakers. It was made clear during the coordination meeting that the Estimate would not be altered because of perceived policy biases.
- There may still be some discomfort about the overall tone of the Estimate which, some analysts fear, could be interpreted as critical of the Muslim religion. While the Estimate focusses specifically on the political aspects of the Islamic revival, there is no separation of church and state in Islam.

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NIE 36-87: Islamic Fundamentalism: Implications for
the Arab World and the United States

Background Information for the DCI

- This Estimate was initiated by the National Intelligence Officer for Near East and South Asia, and was included in the published production plan of the National Intelligence Council. It was drafted by [REDACTED] [REDACTED] the NIC's Analytic Group.

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- The Estimate is the first product of the Intelligence Community to deal specifically with the issue of Islamic Fundamentalism and the political implications of the Islamic revival. From the beginning, this estimate was intended to examine some of the broader and subtler impacts of the Islamic resurgence. US interests can, and will, be affected by the resurgence, even in the absence of more visible revolutionary and terrorist manifestations.

- To a far larger extent than is usual, material for this estimate was gathered from open source material and academic research. [REDACTED]

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- Coordination of the draft was a long process, and took four sessions over a period of two weeks. The time devoted to the coordination meetings was well spent, however, with intense discussion and debate on a number of important substantive points. The "optimistic" and "pessimistic" views expressed in the Estimate are indicative of the range of analysts' basic assumptions in dealing with this complex problem.

- A major obstacle during the coordination meetings was a reluctance on the part of some analysts to make judgments on "religious" issues, feeling that our analysis could be interpreted as culturally chauvinistic. This problem was at least partially solved by the optimistic-pessimistic formulation, and by attempting to ensure that the language in the text focussed clearly on political, rather than religious, issues.

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NIE 36-87: Islamic Fundamentalism: Implications for
the Arab World and the United States

PRECIS

The Islamic resurgence will likely be a powerful political force in the Arab world for the next decade. No Arab regime now appears threatened by an Iranian-style upheaval, nor are US alliances in immediate danger. However, the revival may weaken some regimes and contribute to political turmoil. Tunisia, Egypt, and Bahrain are at greatest risk over the next five years.

Analysts differ on the impact of the Islamic revival. Optimists see the potential for Islam to hold society together in the face of enormous social and economic challenges. The pessimistic view focuses on the reactionary impulses and the zealotry that make compromise, flexibility, and adaptability dangerous offenses.

Although deeply divided, the revival focusses on Islam's concept of justice, opposition to oppressive government, and rejection of foreign influence. These can create stark differences between lower class popular Islam and the establishment Islam of governing elites. Most Arab Muslims accept their leaders and secular features of society, but many are returning to stricter practice of Islam, study and benevolent societies are forming, and political organizations are attracting new members.

Arab governments use suppression and accommodation to manage the revival and most have been relatively successful. However, broad populist pressures could be destabilizing: economic and political inequities are increasingly viewed in a religious context, less subject to compromise; development may be slowed by accommodation of Islamic sensibilities and demands for "de-Westernization"; and imposing religious orthodoxy will offend non-Muslim communities and Westernized elites.

Fundamentalists regard the US as the symbol of Western influences and resent our cultural dynamism, economic reach, and military capabilities. The appeal of American culture, support of Israel, actions against Muslims in Lebanon and Libya make the US more threatening and dangerous than any other outside power, including the Soviet Union. However, the depth of anti-American feelings varies considerably from country to country. The USSR is the target of the same xenophobia and is unlikely to be able to take serious advantage of anti-Western feelings. The Soviets have mixed feelings about the Islamic resurgence since it is likely to reduce Western influence.

The news is not altogether bad, however.

- US friends in the region have been successful in protecting relations with the US, as they try to dampen revivalist sentiment.
- The revival is less anti-Western among Sunni Muslims--the vast majority of Arabs.
- The Islamic revival is largely unorganized, and lacks leadership. While this amorphous character hinders control of the revival, it also helps diminish the potentially dangerous impulses of the phenomenon.
- The range of US influence, conceptual bonds between Islam and the religious heritage of the US, and emphasis on incompatibilities between the USSR and Islam can help lessen anti-US sentiment.

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